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OBSERVATIONS

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PLAN

Proposed for establishing

“A DISPENSARY & MEDICAL SOCIETY

“ For the private and only immediate
“ Use of the Subscribers, their Families,
“ and Friends.”

L O N D O N:

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M.DCC.LXXIX.



OBSERVATIONS, &c.

PARTICULAR attachments are in few instances more just and beneficial, than when formed between patients and medical practitioners: they are founded on the tried skill and integrity of the one, and that complacential confidence of the other, which greatly contributes to tranquility and the restoration of health: and so essential has this interesting connection been found to the successful practice of Medicine, that there are few families who have not a select physician and apothecary.

These considerations, which were suggested on the first perusal of "A Plan of the Medical Society and Dispensary, for the private and only immediate Use of the Subscribers, their Families, and Friends," appeared to me sufficient to obviate the presumed advantages of this new institution.

But

But having observed a continuation of advertisements for carrying it into execution, and conversed with persons desirous of ascertaining these proposed advantages, I am prompted to declare my sentiments upon a subject of no small importance to the public. To this I am further induced by the connection I have formed with those public and private societies, that have been long known under the name of Medical Societies; none of the members of which, I presume, are connected with the institution before me, though it has assumed the title of "Medical Society".

In the hour of sickness, most persons are desirous of chusing their own practitioners; and it would be equally dangerous and cruel to deny them a privilege, that must contribute so much to their recovery. But in a public institution, where the election of medical officers must depend upon a majority, the minority must consequently be disappointed, and, when labouring under sickness, must either employ these officers, who were admitted contrary to their choice, or be at the extraordinary expence of others. It is even doubtful, whether the majority themselves would employ the very persons elected by their own suffrages. It is well known, that the success of a candidate generally depends more upon the interest of a few
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active persons, than upon his own qualifications: and in the exigence of disease, these very persons must perceive, that no gentleman of much medical practice or experience would be the partner of such an illiberal monopoly; and they would therefore naturally seek abroad for relief, where they were most likely to find it. Hence the very ends of the institution would be frustrated, and only the views of interested practitioners, managers, auditors, messengers, and other dependents, be successful. Were even these objections overcome, what gentleman would chuse to have his complaints known to a public society, or suffer those of his wife and daughters to be exhibited to the general inspection of "managers, representatives," and other inquisitive persons? He must certainly entertain a very inadequate idea of female excellence, who discovers so little regard for the delicacy of the sex.

In forming new establishments, it is the common practice to depreciate all the old: but among medical gentlemen, such narrow and illiberal sentiments are equally unbecoming and suspicious. The mind that is apt to assign base motives for the actions of others, may justly be suspected of natural depravity. This sentiment must strike every person, who reads the Plan of this new Society,
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which is introduced in the following uncandid and unjust language : “ The various depredations
 “ made upon most people by the unskilled in
 “ phyfic and surgery ; the great and heavy expences we incur in sickness by the faculty in
 “ general ; and the superabundance of shop-medicines indiscriminately administered by some
 “ apothecaries, and wantonly poured upon us,
 “ even in the most slight disorders, are causes
 “ sufficiently alarming for us to be armed against
 “ these inconveniences and concomitant evils,
 “ and to be watchful of our health and property,
 “ that these estimable blessings in life may no
 “ longer continue the prey of greedy men, nor yet
 “ become the ingredients of physical pestles and
 “ mortars.”

Though these charges merit only silent contempt ; yet, for the sake of undeceiving the public, it may not be improper to enquire into the validity of some of them, and see how far the evils complained of are obviated by the present plan.

The first part complains of “ the depredations
 “ made upon *most* people, by the *unskilled* in
 “ phyfic and surgery.” These critics, however, who have so dogmatically decided upon the conduct of others, and charged the faculty with such
 public

public depredations, have not yet condescended to subscribe their names, or to afford us any proof of their own disinterestedness. On the contrary, if their plan be impartially examined, the character of "greedy men" may appear peculiarly appropriate to themselves. An extent of three miles on every side of Temple-Bar, to which their plan reaches, will comprehend fifty thousand families; and reckoning each family to consist of six persons, the expence of the first year, provided every family so situated were to adopt the plan, will amount to the sum of £500,000, and half that amount or £250,000 every succeeding year: but the least of these sums is more than all the practitioners within the bills of mortality raise from the public. There may be four hundred of them within the prescribed limits; and if this money were equally divided among them, the mean amount of their incomes would be £650 per annum; a sum, I will venture to say, that the majority of them cannot boast of falling to their lot.

Were we to make the calculation upon a smaller scale, the same proportions would result: hence, in an œconomical view, this new institution is by no means calculated to benefit the public; but seems rather contrived to produce those effects, with which the faculty at large are charged, "de-
" predations

“ predations upon the people,” to answer the purposes of “ greedy men.” And hence the public will at once discover with what propriety the promoters of this new institution caution them “ to be watchful of their health and property.”

Persons of suspicious minds are very apt to bring charges against others, which are most applicable to themselves. An example of this is afforded in this institution, which is to have nine managers, each of whom is to receive £ 50 for thirty-five visits; while the honest apothecary, in the common line of business, would pay twice as many visits for half the money: and yet the authors of this new scheme, modestly apply, to these practitioners, the epithet of “ greedy men,” and pretend to found their plan upon the principle of œconomy.

This new monopoly will not, indeed, lessen the practice of any regular physician; but it is evidently calculated to injure the apothecaries, by depreciating their knowledge, and exciting a general prejudice against them. I have, therefore, no other motive in delivering my sentiments on this occasion, than that of doing justice to a large and useful part of the community. The access to families with which apothecaries are indulged,
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and the opportunities they have of knowing their concerns, and imposing upon their weakneffes, all conspire to render their trust, in a moral view, exceedingly important: and yet how few, if any, instances occur, of their abusing the confidence of their friends, or of appropriating those advantages, which their situation is supposed to put within their reach! This moral rectitude, amidst the various family concerns to which they are privy, is the best refutation of the charge of injuring "the health and property" of their patients, which the framers of this new plan have brought against them.

I have already intimated, that the mean expence of medical attendance to families, is not equal to that proposed by the New Institution; but admitting it were so, in a public view, is it not of more benefit to society to diffuse the advantages of practice among four hundred families, than to confine it to a monopoly of a few individuals, unknown by any other distinction, than their invectives against the faculty?

When I appeal to citizens whose generosity is almost unbounded, and to parents who know the expences of a family, I cannot but believe they will chearfully compensate the guardians of

their health, for their unwearied endeavours to preserve that dearest of blessings. When they consider the confined line to which the faculty are limited — that they have no time they can call their own — are disturbed in their sleep at night — and totally deprived, by business and anxiety, of the enjoyment even of one half day in the week ; I am persuaded the public cannot envy them the recompence they receive ; they cannot hesitate to discountenance a monopoly, that, under the pretence of œconomy, is calculated not only to destroy the faith and confidence reposed in the faculty, and consequently the happiness of individuals in the hour of sickness, but also to deprive a very useful and exemplary part of the community of those profits, which, I will venture to say, are earned with the greatest anxiety and labour.

I am so far from thinking the returns made to this department of practitioners adequate to the trouble which they undergo night and day, that I have often wondered they have not agreed upon some general medium of applying a remedy more proportioned to their labour and station in life.

I am ready to admit, that a few may be unworthy of the trusts reposed in them ; but the depravity of individuals will not support a charge against
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the whole body, the major part of whom are men of reading, of a general knowledge of science, and an honour to society. Had the directors of this medical institution consulted the public good, more than their private emolument, they might have found objects for exercising their benevolence where it was really wanted, without interfering where it was both unnecessary and improper ; and these I shall endeavour to point out.

The people I mean, labour under difficulties much greater than are generally imagined ; and their patience under suffering makes them less conspicuous than most other ranks, though none are more deserving of protection. They have known better days, and consequently feel with keener sensibility, the reverse of their condition : their reluctance in complaining often reduces them very low in health and spirits, before they can venture to apply for relief, and thereby disease is accumulated upon want. These constitute the lower part of the middle class of people.

One powerful inducement to extend medical aid towards these silent sufferers, is the affectionate gratitude which they ever entertain and express toward their benefactors ; and one grateful tear
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from an afflicted fellow-creature, just emerging into health, will prove the best recompence to a humane heart; the eye that was once sunk and dry, when brightened with returning health, and moistened by an effusion of thankfulness, is a tribute, which, to a tender heart, is too dear to be estimated, and too dear for any but the good to enjoy.

In place, therefore, of the new monopoly, I would recommend a Plan for giving advice to the poor of this middle class of people, and encouraging them to apply freely for it. To effect this, an house should be taken in a central part of the metropolis, for the reception of Patients during the times of prescribing, which may be two hours, from eight to ten every morning; and I doubt not but six physicians might be found of sufficient humanity and leisure, to devote, each of them, two hours in the week, from the generous motive of thus relieving the most distressed of their fellow-creatures.

The expence of a house fit for the purpose, which is the greatest that would be incurred, might be defrayed by a subscription at large among the wealthy and the good; and a few individuals might
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be found, even among the faculty, that would sustain the expence of every contingency. Such a plan would contribute to keep this class of people out of the hands of impostors, and afford them an immediate opportunity of procuring medical assistance.

To forward the establishment of this plan, I have ventured to propose some Formulæ, as a groundwork for future improvement: it will save much trouble to the members of such a benevolent institution, and tend to facilitate the manner of prescribing, till a better mode is adopted; and a copy of it should be sent to every apothecary in London, to enable him to compose the medicines.

In the titles of the Formulæ, terms expressive of specific qualities are in general avoided, as nothing is more difficult to ascertain, or more likely to mislead a prescriber, who might be induced to order a medicine more from its title, than from any experience of its efficacy.

Many medicines, indeed, to which great powers have been ascribed, are omitted here, partly from their high price, but more from a suspicion
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that the virtues attributed to them are rather fictitious than real ; it is hence that Castor, Musk, Saffron, and some other articles, are excluded, till future experience shall have established their reputation upon more certain evidence than is at present afforded.

P O S T S C R I P T.

SINCE the preceding observations were sent to the press, I have seen a plan for establishing the "Amico-Medical Society." The principal difference in this Institution from the former, consists in the expence, which, in the Amico-Medical Society, is eight guineas for each family of six persons, or £450,000, for an extent of three miles on every side of Temple-Bar, which, at a medium for each practitioner within those limits, is £1125 a year; and yet the authors of this extraordinary scheme have the modesty to conclude their address to the public in this manner: "The
 " many advantages to families and individuals, attending this institution, are too obvious to require any illustration, as there are few who have
 " not experienced the *great expence* attending illnesses."

Speedily will be published,

A
R E P L Y

To a PAMPHLET, entitled

‘ R E M A R K S
‘ O N

“ A LETTER to SIR ROBERT BARKER, Knt.
“ F. R. S. and GEORGE STACPOOLE, Esq;
“ upon GENERAL INOCULATION, by
“ JOHN COAKLEY LETTSOM, M. D. F. R. S.
“ and S. A.”

‘ By the Hon. Baron T. DIMSDALE,
‘ First Physician and actual Counsellor of State to her
‘ Imperial Majesty the EMPRESS of all the
‘ RUSSIAS, and F. R. S.’

